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Archbishop Messmer: Most Reverend and Right Reverend Prelates, Reverend Fathers, Delegates to the Congress, Ladies and Gentlemen: Inasmuch as we are still very much crowded with business matters for this meeting, I will dispense with any further remarks and come at once to the papers. There are two papers that were left over from yesterday afternoon's meeting and which are to be read this morning. The first one will be a paper on the missionary work done among the negroes of these United States, and it affords me very great pleasure, indeed, to be able to introduce to you a dear old friend of mine whose acquaintance I made when we both were young priests down East, at a time when he sacrificed himself for the work of the Church among the negroes, the colored Catholics, of New York. He has ever been in that mission since, and he just told me that I had the honor of introducing to this meeting a colored man who has turned white in the service of the negroes. (Laughter and applause.) I have the pleasure and the honor of introducing to you the Rev. John E. Burke, Director General of the Work Among Negroes. (Applause.)

THE WORK FOR THE NEGRO.

Paper by

The Rev. John E. Burke, Director-General "Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People," New York, N. Y.

Most Reverend Archbishops, Right Reverend Prelates, Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Ladies and Gentlemen: I hope that I may be heard in this large building. This paper should have been read yesterday afternoon. The colored man was crowded out (laughter), but he gets there just the same. (Laughter.)

The religious and industrial improvement of the negro is so

plainly demanded by every argument of reason, patriotism and religion as to make their repitition almost useless. The nation that enslaved him owes him full scope for self-help and development according to his merit; the section that kept him in slavery owes him equality of opportunity for elevating employment with the white man, and the Church which claims itself divine must accord to him, in their fulness, the benefits of Christ's redemption.

The divine energy and influence of the Catholic Church have diminished the crimes and miseries of mankind, and nothing but the spirit and work of that Church can meet the necessities arising from the emancipation of the colored people. Our American Hierarchy holds it as a specially sacred duty to preach the Gospel to these *nine millions of souls,* and is also particularly solicitous to grant them the extra boon of industrial education.

I am speaking to you—I am pleading with you in behalf of these millions of spiritually starving children at the very doors of the Church, and beg you to remember the appalling fact that 4,000,000 of them have not received the grace of Baptism; that less than 200,000 of them are Catholics, and that the Bishops of the South are crying out in God's name for men and means to evangelize these lowly brethren of Jesus Christ. They seek workmen burning with zeal for souls; they appeal to the Religious Communities of men and women to come to their assistance. I am not pleading for a foreign mission or for a people in the wilds of some far-off region; but for a nation within a nation, in our midst—not the wards of the nation, but a self-existing, independent people equal before the law with ourselves, with great and laudable aspirations for all the advantages of religion, education and thrift, who are going to stay here and who have a right to remain. The time has come when this race in our country, left without religious training, except the vile enthusiasm of the camp meeting and the false inspiration of the revival, must be evangelized, or the Church in America will be false to her duty.

Generally speaking, the religion of the colored people in the South is a mixture of low-grade Protestant Christianity and superstition. Outside of Maryland and parts of Louisiana, where the original settlers were Catholics, our religion never gained a solid footing in the slave states, and what the colored people know of Christianity they learned from their Protestant masters. Nine-tenths of those who profess religion belong to the various divisions and sub-divisions of the Baptist and Methodist sects. Before the war, the Catholic whites of the South lived, for the most part, in the cities and larger towns. Hence, it is there that the Catholic colored people are mostly to be found. Still, they may be seen in

every Catholic congregation of the South. Their spiritual needs are cared for. Anyone who knows the Southern priests will not be surprised at this, for they are educated and pious men. We are not to forget that it is to them and to their predecessors, as well as to the conscientious masters of ante-bellum days, that we owe it that there are any colored Catholics at all in the South.

Are the colored people improving? Materially, most assuredly; in morality, it is doubtful—certainly not as regards the True Religion. The government reports will show how they have advanced in industry, property-holding and education. Protestantism, a kingdom divided against itself and never commissioned to preach the Gospel, has failed in the conversion of this people. Protestantism never yet converted a nation or people. In spite of the fact that millions of non-Catholic money have been spent for the "education" of the colored people of the South, the restraint of the Gospel has not been put on them, and it is agreed by friendly students of their condition that, *as a race,* their moral progress has been disappointing.

The Catholic Church has been handicapped by scarcity of missionaries and great poverty of resources in the South, which it must always be kept in mind, is intensely Protestant; but wherever you find a Catholic colored congregation you find unity, order and good moral living. From the "persevering" workers among them comes the testimony to their solid piety. In many localities, in spite of most trying conditions, their holy lives edify their white neighbors, many of whom have been urged to a better love of God and even to an entire reformation of life by the example of the colored Catholics.

Though the varied difficulties regarding the conversion of the colored people to the Catholic Church are great and perplexing, yet they are by no means insurmountable. Are we to be scared by difficulties? If God be with us, who is against us? Conservatism may be a virtue, but even priests have too much of the good thing. Are we to introduce into the discussion of religious projects and work the prudence of the banker discounting a note? The Church's progress is one continual conquest. She is aggressive and venturesome to disturb old conditions for the sake of souls. No dreamer is she; never asleep, but ever the wakeful and alert mother to nurture and protect her children.

You often hear it asked: "What can you do with a colored man?" You hear it stated: "You cannot convert the negro." To day the improvability of any part of mankind is to deny the ability of the Christian Religion. If the Catholic Church cannot convert the negro, then she is not the Church of God.

This race is a warm-hearted, naturally religious people, big children if you will, with the tantalizing weaknesses of children, forgetful of favors and of injuries alike, patient and long-suffering, having an abiding faith in the "Lord Jesus." They are without the refined vices of the whites. They have no fight with the Church; theirs is the prejudice of ignorance unmixed with malice. The Lord, indeed, makes more allowances for them than we do.

As soon as they know anything about the Church's real doctrines and practices they are attracted to them. Especially are they won by the character and life of the Catholic priest and the sweet charity and devotion of the holy Sisterhoods. They are most anxious to have their children brought up under the influence of the priests and sisters.

The colored people are what slavery made them. It robbed them of the power of *self-direction* and took from them the great civilizing power of *the family life.*

The real colored problem consists in introducing the principles of justice and charity, the teachings of our Blessed Lord among the unschooled and somewhat bigoted portion of the white population. One of the leaders of the race said: "When the white man will observe the Golden Rule and the colored man keep the Ten Commandments, there will be no negro problem." This, indeed, is the duty of Catholics—accord him justice and keep him in charity and send Catholic missionaries to teach him the Ten Commandments.

The Church's mission is not to do with the social side of the problem. She must be free to preach the Gospel; upon that office divine she must concentrate her whole energy. Of course, she teaches the whites to be more Catholic, and her principles of justice and charity will guide them in the settlement of their local differences and troubles. She reminds the colored people that it is not by buying the lands, it is not by the possession of wealth, it is not by being educated in colleges, or by receiving a university degree, that the race is to be elevated, for "not by bread alone doth man live," but by obeying the injunction of Jesus Christ, who said: "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things will be added to you." (Matt. vi.) The ultimate test of a race is moral wealth, and this is the only power that can overcome race antagonism.

SCHOOLS AND COLORED TEACHERS.

The work of the Church for this race is to begin with the SCHOOLS—the SCHOOLS! We must multiply them in the South. How many souls could be saved if we had a good number of

Catholic schools in the country districts where nearly 85 per cent of the colored people live, where morality is at a higher ebb, and where their public schools hold sessions for no longer than four to five months of the year. We could hold the full term.

Let well-trained and devout Catholic teachers be under the supervision of the priest, who should visit the schools regularly. Whence the teachers? From the colored people themselves. The public schools of the South are in an increasing measure taught by colored men and women. Constantly, colored are taking the places of the white teachers. Besides, there are many private schools thus taught. Our religious communities are not able to supply the demand for Sisters to teach the white congregations. Certainly, by reason of ties of association and race kinship, the colored teachers will succeed with their own, whose qualities, good and bad, they understand better than white teachers. They must be good Catholics and well paid. To supply these teachers a Normal College should be established. A part of the annual collection for negro missions, ordered by the Council of Baltimore, and a part of the amount gathered by the recently incorporated "CATHOLIC BOARD FOR MISSION WORK AMONG THE COLORED PEOPLE," might be well set aside to found this "NORMAL COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS."

Think of the hundreds of teachers in the South—graduates of the various Protestant centers of learning, who are, as a consequence, trained in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church. We must produce an antidote to this poison. Realizing how heartily the American Bishops desire to give to the colored people the double boon of religious and industrial training, I cried out as I was inspecting recently the great institution in Alabama founded by that wonderful benefactor of his race, Booker T. Washington: "O, for a Catholic Tuskegee!" In my judgment, Tuskegee Institute would be ideal if the light of the True Faith could be kept always burning there.

COLORED PRIESTS.

Besides desiring colored teachers, I believe that the great mass of colored people wish to have priests of their own race. The older generation and those who have always been worshipping with the whites, notably in Louisiana, will tell you that they prefer the white priests. But that generation is fast passing away, and in its place are growing up generations of young men and women who, with a laudable race pride, will tell you, "We want our own priests." They naturally wish for their own leaders and teachers in religion, as they have them in other departments. In the large cities they may

prefer white priests, but considering the country districts, where nearly 85 per cent. of the colored population live, the vast majority of them prefer their own. I believe this multitude can be best reached by its own priests.

The ordination of colored men to the priesthood is not, indeed, a question of social equality. It is a question of the salvation of souls, and it is a question of whether the race can furnish fit subjects for that exalted office. Objections to colored priests rest on sentiment and on prejudice, which we should not permit to sway against the principles of our Holy Religion and the Church's practice of ordaining priests of every race, wherever individuals are found worthy.

A colored priest, nowadays, must have the courage and self-sacrifice almost of a saint to work for his people, in some places. Yet he realizes that he is best fitted to work for them. He knows them and will feel the inconveniences and sacrifices less than the white priests. He will show his people, too, that in spite of even the prejudice of Catholics, the Catholic Church alone is the Church of all nations, that she recognizes "neither Jew, nor Greek, Roman or barbarian," race or color. The colored people have confidence in those of their preachers who are anyways half-right—men, who at best cannot be much, and who have not much to offer them in Protestantism.

Why should not a colored boy who receives a special religious training obtain the grace of God to lead the life of a good priest? Youths who are Catholics by tradition and training could be ordained, those who have been nurtured in faith and morality in families whose ideals of the Catholic priesthood have been for generations the highest and purest—such offer the better hopes of perserverance and devotion to duty. Catholics of Maryland and Louisiana could supply the subjects. It is a good rule not to ordain recent converts.

But can the race supply them? I unhesitatingly assert, *yes*. It is not proposed to ordain the race—only *individuals* of it. It cannot be denied that the colored people are saints compared with the Cretans and Romans in the time of St. Paul. The former have many moral weaknesses and lapses; but listen to what the Apostle of the Gentiles says of the latter. He gives them a pretty bad name. The Cretans, he calls, "always liars, evil beasts, slothful bellies"; and yet of them he commands Titus to "ordain priests in every city." (*Epis. to Titus, Chap. I.*) Of the Romans, he wrote that "they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man: wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart unto uncleanness,"

etc., etc. (*Epis. to Romans, Chap. I.*) And yet, we know that from the ranks of these Romans came the chosen ones, from whose filthy souls the Holy Ghost had purged out the old leaven, who became priests, bishops and popes. Behold what the grace of God can accomplish! So, from the detested Gentiles came the companions and fellow-workers of St. Paul in the sacred ministry. Not the race, but the *individual* consider. When a man chooses a partner for life, he does not marry her whole family. St. Paul took great risks. Yes; but he had the grace of God for his means to an end, and it did not fail him. Every Bishop, to-day, takes a great risk when he accepts a candidate for the priesthood from any race of men. The same grace is able to-day to transform the souls of men and women, to make them as pure, as strong, and as heroic, as became the ones selected by St. Paul. *"O, ye of little faith!"*

The Catholic laymen may share in this apostolic work for the negro. They should use their influence to remove race prejudices, which are an obstacle to the work of the missionary. We must be Catholics from principle, not from circumstances or environment. Is it not a part of our faith that the white and black men are children of common parents and of "Our Father" in Heaven? Is it not true, also, that if a curse was uttered against Cham and his progeny, that the curse was blotted out forever by the Blood of Jesus Christ Who died for all? We must prove to the colored people that as Christians, in the full meaning of the word, we are willing to acknowledge them our brothers. We Catholics should also have very positive convictions, and give firm expression to them, regarding the injustice of discriminating against any man, woman or child on account of race or color. We should be the first to grant them lucrative work when they are fit to do it, equally with the whites. Let justice, not prejudice, rule. Let charity sway. Hearts are trumps!

The layman's influence must also be exercised to elevate the colored woman. It is the glory of the Catholic Church that she took from paganism, when they were the tools and slaves of the stronger sex, the women from whom our mothers and sisters descended, and made them equal to our forefathers. Shall not the Catholic women of our day, in their turn, extend a friendly hand to their colored sisters, to draw them out of the mire of sin and degradation? It will not be enough to convert them to the True Faith, but it will be necessary to form them to heroic virtue, that they may withstand their special temptations to sin. Without pure women we cannot have virtuous mothers and Christian families.

Give support and encouragement to the devoted priests and sisters who are toiling for souls in the Southern colored fields, and

especially to the zealous Josephite Fathers, who are the mainstay of the colored work.

Assistance is craved for all the missions by the "Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People," an organization lately incorporated by the laws of the State of Tennessee. The creation of this Board means an organized effort which gives a decided emphasis to our Home Missions. It does not detract from the importance of the propagation of the Faith in foreign lands; it does not lessen our love for that Catholic duty, to insist upon the support of our special missions *at home*.

Thousands and thousands of dollars are sent annually to foreign countries to convert the tribes deeply seated in vice and superstition; but how much do our Catholic missionaries receive to bring the tidings of great joy to the colored millions of the South, to propagate the Faith among them? It is a case of "not that I love Caesar less, but Rome more"—not that we should love the foreign missions less, but the home missions more. This is well regulated charity.

The famous John Randolph, of Roanoke, Va., once visited a lady and found her surrounded with her seamstresses making up a quantity of clothing, "What work have you in hand?" said he. "Oh, I am preparing this clothing to send to the poor Greeks." On taking leave, at the steps of the mansion, he saw some of her servants in need of the very clothing which their tender-hearted mistress was sending abroad. He exclaimed, "Madam, Madam, the Greeks are at your doors!"

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